

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBUL #2850 3001140
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 261140Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5958
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2154
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 002850

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA
NSC FOR WOOD
OSD FOR WILKES
CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A, CG CJTF-101 POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PTER AF

SUBJECT: THE PARTY YOU ARE TRYING TO REACH IS UNAVAILABLE -
GHAZNI,S CELL NETWORK REMAINS DOWN

¶1. SUMMARY: On October 21, Ghazni,s cell phone network shut down in response to Taliban threats. As of October 25 the phones remain nonfunctional despite Ghazni Governor Mohammad Usman Usmani,s jailing of two local phone company executives and his promises to have the networks up and running again.
End Summary.

USMANI TAKES A STAND AGAINST TERRORISTS

¶2. In an October 22 three-hour security meeting with provincial officials attended by the PRT, Usmani stressed that it was completely unacceptable for the cell phone networks to bow to Taliban demands, and informed those present that he had met with the owners of the networks in Ghazni and made it clear to them that if they did not have the networks up and running by the following morning, he would have them jailed and their offices locked. Usmani expressed fears that if the Taliban are able to shut down the cell phone towers in the District Centers, it could enable them to carry out a "spectacular attack in Ghazni City."

¶3. Usmani noted that over 300 people had come to his residence that day to complain about the cell phone network being down. "Business is being stopped, and people are losing millions," he stressed. "If we cannot defend the rights of the people, then there is no difference between us and the Taliban," he said, adding, "I have warned the companies to turn on the network or I will lock them out of their offices. They are listening to the enemy, not the government."

¶4. Usmani also issued a "letter of guarantee" to all cell phone providers in Ghazni province, essentially promising them that they would be protected. He didn,t specify how this would happen, and ANA 2nd Brigade Commander 203rd said October 22 that he didn't have enough ANA to protect all the cell phone towers.

¶5. On October 24, Governor Usmani reported to DOS PRTOFF that two of the local cell phone executives have been jailed: the executive for Afghan BSM, and the executive for Ensalat. As of October 26, PRTOFF understands that the executives remain in jail, and the phone network remains non-operational. Sources in Ghazni say that the network must be restarted from Kabul, which may account for the delay.
(PRT Note: It is unclear what lawful authority Governor is

relying upon to jail these executives. It is also unclear as to what crimes, if any, the executives are suspected of committing.)

WOOD